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HOW PHILOSOPHY CAUSED WORLD WAR I ... AND OTHERS

I. Introduction

Philosophy over the years has ruled the world, including the feats in rational ideas and science; the respective but antagonistic sociopolitical conceptions of libertarian and communitarian divides have both developed a world of free individualism and communalistic idealism. In this way, philosophical ideas have built, ruled and ruined the world.

Now, for all my small years of appreciating social import or product of philosophical reflection is the realization that all of human history has been a product of some critical reflection. From Thales' worries to the several critical appreciations of his, human history has witnessed steady dialectical progress and desolation. From Galilean world view (the relativity of motion/naturalism) which questioned basic medieval rational dogmatism, Newtonian physics, to Wright Brothers airplane; and from the computer, the atomic/nuclear/oxygen bomb, to the boundless social media of the contemporary, the world has had untold progress (through its curiosity and critical thought), with its devastating evil other-side—the acme of which is a highly technologically united world that can be extinguished in few minutes by its own product (philosophy). Skirmishes of such extinguishing has surfaced in form of famine (India, in the early half of the 20th century; Ethiopia and Somalia, in the beginning of the 21st). Goldman's anarchism (against patriotism), nationalism (in the third world, Europe, China, and US), Marxism, liberalism, conservatism, and, particularly, communism, fa-

scism, and Nazism became potent pressures in quest for change. In fact, “much blood *has* flowed in every parts of the world as a result of the conflict *arising from* incompatible philosophical ideologies and the men and women who espoused them” (Goff *et al* 2008, 3). All these culminated in a polarized world and the World Wars.

In the world today, the scientific conquest of nature has become the scientific conquest of man—the union of growing productivity and growing destruction; the brinkmanship of annihilation; the surrender of thought and hope and fear to the decisions of the powers that be; and the preservation of misery in the face of unprecedented wealth—constitutes the most description of the present dilemma of man robed in violence; it shapes entire universe of discourse and action, intellectual and material culture, turning things topsy-turvy. Perhaps, such is the product of human egotistic and imperialist adventure introduced by Locke’s thought.

Then came Nietzsche’s preachment against extant traditional Western culture (religious beliefs and morality)—a specific peoples’ philosophical ideas, practice and values against Western imperialists’ suasion. His new *ideas/philosophy/ideology* was that man must dare and go ‘beyond good and evil’, overcome Christianity/religion, democracy/equality to achieve his essential ‘superman’—perhaps through turmoil, revolution, and/or revolution. Besides Hobbes, Locke, Hegel, Newton, Marx, and Freud, Nietzsche’ ideas reshaped world consciousness in quest for nobler existence. There is therefore the need to articulate how these ideas crystalized into the World Wars I and II, the threat of another, and the turmoil beyond.

II. Hegelianism vs. Liberalism: Two Dominant Philosophical Strands of the 19th Century

The philosophical thoughts in especially Western Europe and North America till the rescinding years of the 19th century did (re)shape the world, especially the 20th century and beyond. The intellectual ferment was exacerbated by the reactive consequences from both ends. Initially, the awareness of German philosophical outlook excited American intellectual, social, and political overture. On the one hand was the new England transcendentalism, beginning with Coleridge’s rejecting of Locke’s materialist empiricism but stressing intuition and

universal reason, to Emerson's evidences of moral meaning (as against God's providence) as basis for self-reliance (Popkin 1999, 588). This view soon spread around the US. The St. Louis philosophical society/Hegelians (1866) found Hegel's philosophy congenial to America's rational destiny and quest for a united country and expansion of the American spirit through education, by enlarging freedom and social morality against *laissez-faire* of the British. Back in Germany, Hegel's controversial political theory (absolute spirit) was the pillar of the Prussian State and Nazi Germany. Thus Hegel and Hegelianism provided the basic tool for American philosophical pragmatism, freedom and liberalism, and his influence on Marx's revolutionary political theory decisive. Hegel did not live to witness the matrix of the thoughts he generated mature into full blown two exclusive political forces in communism and liberalism—the forces that ignited enormous passion and violent nationalism between the West and Eastern Europe/Asia.

Basically, Marx and Marxism is committed towards the emancipation or bettering of the condition of the down-trodden and abolition of class-base society and alienation; it is the eventual struggle for the realization of such and the enthronement of communist society over the world. Accordingly, Marx, by his account of dialectical and historical materialism and the principle of change, drew a program to achieve this ideal defined solely by critical assessment, opposition to and rejection of capitalism. In so doing, he discovered the laws of change and social progress; in an avid commitment to better living for all of humanity built upon an impeccable theoretical pedestal, his, therefore, is humanistic. In all, this new/emergent social order shall be socialism leading to communism. The dictatorship of the proletariat marks the end of man's alienation and misery. It ushers in a state of bliss and elder ado. The dictatorship of the proletariat also mark the final liberation of man form the hands of the capitalists. It also marks the end of conflict and antagonism among men. Marxism is basically a critique of capitalist society and how liberation from it could be achieved. It is a humanist program concerned with the liberation of man from the servitude, exploitation and alienation into which the parasitic capitalist system has thrown him. These postulations are, however, antagonistic to the American Spirit—freedom/democratic thought, and pragmatic imperialism. One could try to delineate and establish how the matrix of these thoughts precipitated the WWI. Let us discuss these combustible elements seriatim.

III. World War I (WW I): The Precipitating Philosophical Trends

Invariably, the twentieth century opened on a world dominated by the West and its dominant philosophical strands (with scientific discoveries, technological innovations, economic activity, and military might). From classical Greek philosophical thought up till the nineteenth century, one could fathom that the dominant trends/doctrines vacillated among idealism (that ideas or spirit is basic reality), pragmatism (emphatic of praxis or relevance), liberalism/democracy (thrives on freedom and rights), socialism/communism (preferring common or State ownerships), and fascism/Nazism (keen on egregious nationalism). Each of these convictions is a by-product of either side of rationalism (that reality best depicted by reason) or empiricism (that reality is best depicted by experience), the two conflicting philosophical systems that have shaped world socio-politics and other trends.

Empiricism and the scientific/technological trends All of science (investigation via research) is based on experience. That experience is the basis of knowledge is traceable to Aristotle through other empiricists (Hobbes, Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, etc.). Moreover, scientific philosophical ideas inform Darwin's doctrine of natural selection, demonstrating the descent of man (1859/71). And critical reactions to his initiated further scientific knowledge about human psychology and nature (the introduction by Freud, for instance, of the belief that humans were driven by unconscious pleasure-seeking forces; Einstein's introduced newer thoughts about nature/universe and the velocity of light, following Zeno). In health, discovered cures for puerperal fever, introduction of anesthesia, discovery of anti-bacteria, helped tremendously leading to surges in world populations with a threat to outstrip available supply. Through critical empirical thought, Thomas Edison pioneered the development of electricity enhancing industrial manufacturing of goods, and wireless communication and motion pictures introduced. In the same period, scientists and metallurgists produced explosives and propellants such as cordite introducing new class of artillery and fragmented weaponry.

Emergent economic ideological trends The feat in technology (and its Japanese and Russian parallels) was the dawn of and surge in industrial production and economic control. Thus the industrialized nations needed markets and raw material, often from abroad. The process hastened colonization and Western na-

tions build-up a world-wide industrial and agricultural network built around foreign raw material and labor force and enhanced by rail-roads, sea traffic and the opening-up of the Suez and Panama canals to ease commercial traffic. However, these developments were products of some critical socio-political thought.

Socio-cultural and political trends Certainly, industrialization introduced more complex social network, problems, social classes, and crime. The rich emerged and there was steady growth of prosperous middle-class amid a less impressive improvement in working class conditions. The period also marked a modest shift in the status of women, opening-up opportunities for the 'responsible women' in offices and hospitals. Even though there were markedly growth in aesthetics, new questions about how to rightly depict reality emerged: between science/objectivity and rational approaches, between Bergsonian intuitionism and relativity or Freud's preference for a place of consciousness and non-rational motivations reality. And secularism and traditional modes of religion became in constant conflict (though knowledge of other religions influence philosophers like Schopenhauer and Emerson); new technology introduced new living patterns and cultures, and new modes of conflict around the world. These developments were more palpable in western/central Europe; and the features described form their valuable ideological document suitable for the rest of the less industrialized world.

Imperialism and nationalist trends By the close of the final decade of the 19th century, one would conclude, only France, Britain, and Russia were imperialist/comprador nations (with a mind for the extension of economic and political control over lesser nations). Far from that, there arose a changing cast of imperialist nations, with the emergence of Belgium, Germany, US, Italy and Japan. This informed cheap local labor and amassment of more hands for military expeditions. All led to the blackmailing and scandalous cultural imperialism with Spencer's social Darwinism or the appeal of the Christian missionary message of humility as useful philosophical catalysts. Remarkably, again, those economic philosophies and developments became the basis of imperialism and a trajectory and driving-force of competitive international relations at the turn of the century—with respective national government employing propagandists, lobbyists, and adventurers to extend influence even over waterways and ports to establish military posts beyond land, a basis to polarize and dominate the world indefinitely.

International relations: Nationalism, Competition and armed races; Militarism and alliances As it turned out, critical thought introduced the discoveries in science; the discoveries in science helped initiate newer modes of interpersonal/socio-cultural and political relations leaving the world at some shockwave amid inherited tensions and hostilities once some countries (Germany, Russia, Japan, and Italy) became left disenchanted and frustrated with grievances of not having fair share of territorial possessions. One consequence of emergent world developments was a climate of competing political forces and rising nationalism—a learned emotional loyalty that individuals direct towards a group usually one's immediate society nurtured by a common bond such as especially language or history/ethnicity. Nationalism could direct action and thrives more on rediscovering and glorification of some past. It indoctrinates individuals into supporting a 'nation's course'. Nationalism could unite, dismantle; it could also be ambitious. Consider the power of nationalism in the German emergent philosophy/call for unity of all Germans in the early 20th century. So it can lead to dominance and persecution provoking self-determination (for instance, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires respectively following Hegel's preference for super-humans and super-state). Thus fronts of nationalism took the form of 'nation's/territorial' or 'racial segregation or agitation' fueling the flames of security quest, arms races, alliances, and songs of war.

The competitions that ensued were not only nationalistic but ideological, between divided political forces: liberals and conservatives. While the latter favor status quo (class distinction, authoritarianism, preservation of traditional practices/values, and privileges, as in Russia, Germany, and Austro-Hungary), the liberals extol value of/freedom, rights, and law (as was, initially, in Britain and France) leading to a battle of wits, with the worse-off left to organize themselves into labor/workers' unions (for a fair deal via collective bargaining to avert strikes and boycotts; deals that turn out cosmetic), though later, following Marx, became calls for revolutionary destruction of capitalism (conservatism) through socialism (commonwealth) since political and social realities must reflect the dynamics in the economic base. Thus the real contradiction and driving force of international stage became the exegesis of conservation/coercion and that of liberalism/freedom—with the US, Britain, and France in subtle preference for the latter. Notably, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism were taking their impacts in other parts of the world. Essentially, all these developments charged the world, often leading to rivalries/competitions, to the

brink of war. The immediate build-up to these is a new philosophy we could describe as militarism leading-up to arms races, the need to strengthen national securities—stockpiling weapons and increase military establishments including mass armies, with men drafted, trained/equipped and placed on war-alert among some western nations and Japan. Warships and naval armies, and general militarism exacerbated war tensions and assessments of preparedness among competitors. Darwin's (following Heraclitus) ideas led to the belief by nations that 'war was a biological necessity and a law of nature'; many hatched on Nietzsche's dictum that war and courage had accomplished more great things than love of the neighbor. It was believed that qualities of loyalty, cooperation, courage and sacrifice as important tools of human development could only be enhanced through war. In fact, according to Roosevelt, 'No triumph of peace would be quite as great as the sublime triumphs of war.' Some Japanese sayings glorify both war and the warrior. All these spurred more militarism; and one natural response was development of regional or philosophical/ideological blocs/alliances. Sometimes, a nation that was not sure of its parity with another perceived as superior, sorted to create a balance by forming a partnership (of cooperation if war broke out) with a third one. This balancing of power (economic, military, or diplomatic) could be ever-spiraling cause a powerful nation to defend a smaller one to prevent over-power. This confidence could ignite behaviors of aggression, and assessments of provocation. With war seeming, efforts in 1907 towards reconciliation and maintenance of international peace/cooperation. And, with failed diplomacy, actual all-involving war, emerged, first in 1914 between the Great Powers of Europe: Britain, for her efficient economy and large empire backed by a strong naval force; France, as the second largest colonial empire with a diffused political reality, in a strong triple alliance with Russia and Britain against any eventual German, Italian, or Austrian aggression; Russia, a populous and vastest nation with a conservative but expeditions monarchy; and Germany, also a vast and most industrialized alliance with Austria-Hungary and Russia (and later Italy).

Meanwhile, the Americas—the US, South, Latin America, and Canada—were consolidating liberalism (while the US alone, through the Monroe Doctrine, maintained her imperialist agenda in the region, with Canada emerging strong parliamentary democracy). After Russia, Japan had emerged strong from feudal state to a respected modern industrial/military power hence she defeated Russia in 1905 and became the dominant regional force in Asia. And in Persian

Europe and Ottoman Empire were rising calls for reform of antiquated political system for westernization and constitutionalization. However, Western imperialism had dominated the whole Asia (besides Japan) by the first decade of the twentieth century.

The assassination of the heir to the throne, the Austrian archduke in 1914 by Gavrilo Princip made Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia, and the mechanism of the alliance systems transformed this to a full-scale wide war beginning with Austrian bombardment of Belgrade on July 28, 1914; it degenerated around the world, and with the US joining on the side of the allies against the central powers in 1917 under the philosophy that malignant militarism threaten liberal institutions and that “the world must be made safe for democracy”, it was also a signal for its imminent ending. The war actually ended on November 11, 1918. The war lessons ignited more search (particularly by Italy, Germany, and Japan) for more deadly weapons (atomic energy) and more effective means of communication amid international economic crises/great depression, rising dictatorships, political uprisings, and ethnic nationalism. Finally, a League of Nations was established to avert future wars of the scale of the First WW; yet it was a League that prosecuted the Second.

Again, the philosophically trends that culminated in the WWI, did seem overcome at the end of the war; yet such persisted far beyond it and somewhat resurfaced/recrudescence much stronger, intensified by newer emergent philosophical convictions. Spengler's *The decline of the West*, in which he tried to build on Nietzsche's pessimistic view of the West and the *superman*, became the rich resource for the interested warrior. Spengler's postulations appealed to many especially in Germany, whose new leader, Hitler, shared those original ideas (Nietzsche's) with his Italian counterpart, Mussolini. Even the parallel developments in art and literature did embrace Marxist thoughts in concern for the poor. However, the involvements in WW I and Marxist views helped to establish the revolutions in Russia in 1917. Meanwhile, Mussolini preached a 'new-Marxist-Nietzschean' philosophy of the virtue of war (fascism: combat groups) and hatred among Italians; nationalism, anti-Semitism, and racism preached by Hitler in Germany; communism sat-up in China, anti-colonialism in the Middle-East and Africa, and liberal democracy in Japan (non-violence nationalism in India), while the US vacillated from burst to boom back to burst. Philosophically more significant is Hitler's proclamation that the Aryans (German race) is superior to all others world over and that those other do not even deserve to

continue to live, and his half-cooked Darwinian, Nietzschean, and Wagnerian ideas coupled with his radical anti-Semitism. In fact he did not prevaricate on his aversion and distaste for the ignominious way Germany surrendered to the allies under the most humiliating conditionality and cost at the end of WW I.

Thenceforth, Stalinism, Fascism, and Nazism became time-bombs, amid the West, soon to explode the world—exacerbated by mutual suspicion of the emergent semi-dictators and their ideologies. The trajectory of WWI includes Japan's aggression against/invasion of China in 1937, and German aggression of 1938/39 (against Austria and Poland), and Mussolini's taking of Albania in 1939. The Second World War (WW II) had begun, with the US, again, joining reluctantly, and the Holocaust and the atomic bomb as its climax, with over 60 million dead among incalculable material losses!

IV. Conclusion

It is commonly thought and believed that philosophy cannot “bake bread”; but it should because it could; it did, and has been. The thought of philosophy incapacitated status is bored on the premise that praxis is more valuable than ideas. Once that unfounded assumed premise is thus decapitated, then it would be discovered that culmination of philosophical enterprise in the decades of the late 19th and all of the 20th centuries is the adulation of certain values. Yet, those disagreeable pessimists have some grounds since critical thought also introduced new discoveries in communication, art, technology, transportation, and production. If it is thus that the pen is mightier than the sword, that the pen reflect ideas which rule the word, then ideas have ruined the world—the ravaging cold-war down to the late 20th century not exempted.

Invariably, inordinacy, extreme violent primordial/nationalistic passion, ego/ambition and, sometimes, irrationalism, mutual suspicion and leeriness were the common characterization of all the major political actors involved in both wars; war and warriors ought to target only those vaunt actors; any war should be fought on specific fronts by marines led to the battle by their political leaders inviting the war, or in outer-space by drones and other non-human devices/technology (risking unimaginable apocalyptic implications for the solar system, particularly our planet, earth). However, in both world wars, notably, the US never started but joined at some point in conviction of universal goals, a jo-

ining that also marked the ending of each. Part of its hesitation is the conviction that, including in the US, “war, terrorism, and other forms of political violence are in many ways more threatening today than ever...until the 20th century, the vast majority of war deaths were soldiers; today, the young drafted/conscripted and civilian casualty is higher and it is worsening” (Rourke 2005, 11). On the one hand, pre-20th century citizens, it seems to me, were more receptive to nationalistic/universal feelings than what it is today where less altruistic and humane ones dominate, on the other. While the horrors and incalculable losses of both world wars and others remain visible around contemporary world, in this first decade of the 21st century, unfortunately, the negative indicators of those sights and sounds of (peace-meal world) war abound in the ambitions of certain states (Russia, Syria, North Korea and Iran) on the one hand, and the incapacity or vaunt naivety of certain leaders (US’s Trump, UK’s May, and France’s Macron), on the other; yet such were the immediate sparks of the first and second decades of the preceding century. With the most volatile machinery of warfare in the hands of such men, the world and humanity, encumbered by such worries and infamies as hunger and degradation, climatic and other natural disasters amid mired solutions, is at the verge of self-annihilation. Should states mortgage individual subjective destinies as States’ (detested by Hobbes) or individuals should return to their beds the way they made it? The enduring philosophical point is that realism or liberalism should moderate our conceptions of reality, principles of politics/power, cooperation/competition, and science and technology. No philosophy should enhance the extinction of the world (unless it can create another, better one) it is meant to understand and build. Experience and reason has shown us that only a new, impersonal, humanistic, and non-antagonistic philosophy (a tendentious route not taken before) could reverse the obviously disastrous trajectory and avert another impending apocalyptic armageddon. Philosophy (through popularizing ideas, voting or direct-individual action) ought to help in bringing about moral meaning, a better, more cooperative, less conflictive relations and a more rational world, not war. The proper role of states on a neo-moderated-liberalized international/world stage should be critically articulated. Choosing this less familiar road could make all the difference. But the question is: can one/we make the difference? My answer is: yes, I/we can.

Abstract

For all my small years of appreciating social import or product of philosophical reflection is the realization that all of human history has been a product of some critical reflection. Right from Thales' curiosity to the present, human history has witnessed steady dialectical progress and desolation. From Galilean world view, Newtonian physics, to Wright Brothers airplane; and from the computer, atomic/nuclear/oxygen bomb, to the boundless social media of the contemporary, the world has had untold progress (through its curiosity and critical thought), with its devastating evil other-side—the acme of which is a highly technologically united world that can be extinguished in few minutes by its own product (philosophy). Such philosophical thought precipitated Goldman's anarchism (against patriotism), colonialism, nationalism, Marxism, liberalism, conservatism, communism, fascism, and Nazism all which respectively became potent pressures in quest for change. Consequently, the contention of present article is that the much blood *has* flowed in every parts of the world as a result of the tensions *arising from* incompatible philosophical ideologies and the men and women who espoused them, culminating in a polarized world and the World Wars and others around the world. After a careful analysis of some of those pedestals for war-passions, the work discovers that although philosophical though has improved the world, it has also set-up the matrix for dissention. It concludes, therefore, only a new, impersonal humanitistic non-antagonistic philosophy could reverse the trajectory and avert another impending apocalypse. Philosophy ought to help in bringing about moral meaning, to a better, more rational world, not war.

Key words : war, philosophy, ideology, nationalism, militarism, alliance

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